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# SOUTH ASIA BORDERLESS ALLIANCE

BLUEPRINT FOR A REGIONAL MECHANISM FOR ACCELERATING  
BILATERAL REMOVAL OF SPECIFIC NON-TARIFF TRADE BARRIERS

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BILATERAL REMOVAL OF SPECIFIC NON-TARIFF TRADE BARRIERS

**Contract No.** GS-23F-0127P, **Task Order No.** AID-OAA-M-12-00008

**Cover photo:** Trucks wait at the Benapole-Petrapole land port in between India and Bangladesh. (Credit: AMEG project)

## DISCLAIMER

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# ACRONYMS

AMEG	USAID Asia and the Middle East Economic Growth Best Practices Project
BIMSTEC	Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multisectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
IPEC	Indo-Pacific Economic Corridor
MOU	memorandum of understanding
NTB	non-tariff barrier
NTM	non-tariff measure
PMT	project management team
SAARC	South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation
SABA	South Asia Business Alliance
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USCC	U.S. Chamber of Commerce

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Widespread non-compliance with legitimate non-tariff measures (NTMs) and the continued existence of non-tariff trade barriers (NTBs) in South Asia inhibit bilateral, regional, and global trade. As a consequence, citizens, businesses, and governments in the region's member states are deprived of important sources of income. Moreover, these trade barriers constrain intraregional and interregional connectivity, impede progress toward greater food security, leave too many in poverty and susceptible to extremist ideas, and limit the market for U.S.-made products.

This document provides a blueprint for the implementation of a borderless alliance, reflecting learning experiences from the implementation of the Indo-Pacific Economic Corridor (IPEC) initiative, a joint USAID and U.S. State Department initiative implemented by the USAID Asia and Middle East Economic Growth Best Practices (AMEG) project. The most prominent of these lessons is that the slow pace of progress in eliminating NTBs stems primarily from:

- The involvement of too many countries in implementation
- Overly ambitious scopes of work
- Excessive focus on creating permanent institutional bodies
- Lack of strategy and concrete action plans to guide implementation
- Suboptimal coordination during implementation
- Not getting the right people behind recommended change

Inspired by the West Africa Borderless Alliance that emerged in 2011 from the USAID West Africa Trade Hub, the South Asia Borderless Alliance (SABA) is operationally different based on the South Asian context and AMEG lessons learned. SABA is a proposed project mechanism designed to organize multiple, time-limited coalitions of private sector organizations tasked with eliminating specific trade barriers. It entails using evidence-based advocacy to convince public sector stakeholders on the need for change, and working jointly to formulate and implement that change. The proposed U.S. government mechanism would initially be led by a U.S. implementing partner and then eventually handed over to South Asian private-sector leaders. This U.S. implementing partner would use the following collaboration components to ensure SABA's successful launch:

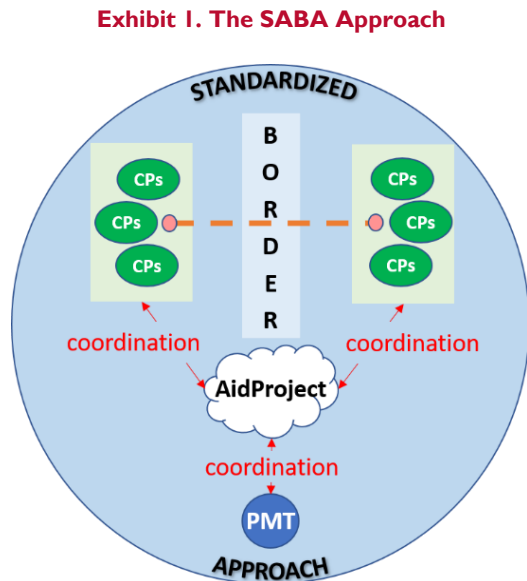
- *One or more coordinating partners* (e.g., chambers of commerce, business associations, and other local partners) at each end of a bilateral trade relationship. Coordinating partners may vary from country to country and from trade barrier to trade barrier.
- *A facilitating project management team (PMT)* that includes a lean team in South Asia to maintain relationships and manage activities under SABA.
- *A standardized approach to management* that is adaptable to any bilateral relationship, coordinating partner, or specific trade barrier.

- A *cloud-based project management system*, which we call AidProject, to coordinate carrying out the mutually agreed plan for elimination of a specific bilateral barrier, enabling fluid project management across countries (see Exhibit I).

In principle, little except the availability of funding should preclude SABA from working across all South Asia member states. However, the realities on the ground demonstrate that some bilateral relationships work better than others. SABA's early work will focus on a limited number of bilateral relationships and barriers, those having the highest probability of success in the short to medium term and of scaling up as the alliance evolves. To ensure sufficient time to build momentum and achieve significant results, SABA should have a five year life with a goal of achieving financial and operational sustainability in that timeframe.

Implementation of the standardized, systematic approaches proposed for operation of the borderless alliance are expected to meaningfully and measurably reduce the time and cost of compliance with legitimate NTMs and accelerate elimination of NTBs. SABA is expected to contribute to the following impacts in South Asia:

- A dramatic improvement in the level and quality of bilateral, regional, and interregional coordination between regional partners in action planning and plan implementation using a cloud-based portal
- Improved focus in targeting and tackling trade barriers through collegially developed trade enhancement strategies and granular action plan implementation, using a more efficient and effective task force mechanism
- Long-range alliance sustainability through private sector interest in maintaining and expanding successful alliance initiatives, with tangible results in increased trade, increased trade efficiency, and expanded markets and market share
- Improvements in food security through integration of regional agricultural markets
- Expanded scope for the export of U.S. goods and services



## SECTION I

# BACKGROUND

In South Asia, the inefficient and inconsistent implementation of legitimate non-tariff measures and the continued existence non-tariff trade barriers inhibit bilateral, regional, and global trade. As a result, citizens, businesses, and governments in the region's member states are deprived of important sources of income. On a higher level, the barriers also constrain intraregional and interregional connectivity, impede progress toward greater food and other security, and limit the market for U.S.-made products.

### A. GENESIS OF THE BORDERLESS CONCEPT

The South Asia Borderless Alliance concept described herein grew out of two prior USAID-funded initiatives:

- *USAID West Africa Trade Hub*. First, SABA is loosely patterned on the borderless alliance that emerged from the USAID West Africa Trade Hub in 2010. Later, the alliance evolved into the West African Borderless Alliance, a coalition of private sector organizations using evidence-based advocacy and collaborating with public sector stakeholders to increase regional trade. The organizations work to reduce transport costs, operationalize the West Africa Trade Liberalization Scheme, cut corruption, publish credible transport and trade data, and facilitate the free movement of persons, goods, and vehicles among 15 nations of ECOWAS.<sup>1</sup>
- *Indo-Pacific Economic Corridor*. Secondly, the successful West African example was reviewed in the early stages of IPEC, and it became clear immediately that the concept would need to be tailored to the South Asian context. AMEG implemented a series of activities designed to simultaneously: 1) promote regional connectivity; and 2) test key assumptions and identify potential partners for the creation of a South Asia Borderless Alliance. The SABA design discussed herein incorporates knowledge derived from these IPEC-sponsored initiatives:

- Bangladesh Non-Tariff Barriers Action Planning Workshop in Dhaka, Bangladesh, December 7-8, 2016
- U.S. Department of State-sponsored Indo-Asia Connectivity for Shared Prosperity Conference in Kolkata, India, December 14-15, 2016
- Dialogue Workshop on Conformity Standards in Delhi, India, May 24-25, 2017
- Bangladesh Advocacy Dialogue to Reduce Non-Tariff Barriers Workshop in Dhaka, Bangladesh, August 8, 2017
- Workshop on Single Window Best Practices with Lessons from Southeast Asia in Colombo, Sri Lanka, August 8-9, 2017
- India Advocacy Dialogue to Reduce Non-tariff Barriers Workshop in Dhaka, Bangladesh, August 17, 2017

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<sup>1</sup> ECOWAS Member States: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo.

- Express Courier Dual Trial Run Task Force Workshop in Kolkata, India, August 22, 2017
- Various meetings in Bangladesh, India, and Sri Lanka between December 1, 2016 and August 31, 2017

## B. LEARNING OUTCOMES

Participants at several of the aforementioned IPEC events highlighted the lack of implementation in the removal of trade barriers, citing a “lack of focus” as the primary reason. Specifically, participants categorized the root problems impeding progress as follows:

- *Too many countries involved.* The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multisectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), and other regional initiatives have resulted in the creation of new, multilateral bureaucracies which have produced few tangible results in trade facilitation to date.
  - *Proposed solution.* Take an “N+1” approach to country involvement, that is, begin with a bilateral approach and, if warranted, incrementally expand successful mechanisms to more South Asian nations (see text box).

### USE AN “N+1” APPROACH TO INCREASE FOCUS

Poor performance on implementation surfaced as a major issue in nearly all the workshops sponsored by AMEG, as well as discussion groups held at the State Department-sponsored Indo-Asia Connectivity for Shared Prosperity Conference in Kolkata, India in December 2016. The term “N+1” arose as code for “start with understanding the challenges in one country, then include a trading partner and, if practical, add additional countries — instead of tackling NTBs and other trade issues through the larger groupings first.” Participants, well-versed in previous failed attempts at reducing NTBs, suggested more “granular” approaches targeting smaller, specific subsets of NTBs. For example, there was a suggestion for an express courier trail run by truck across the Benapole-Petrapole border crossing; the aim would be to determine the best regulatory approaches for regularization of such traffic (not prohibited) following implementation of the Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, and Nepal Motor Vehicles Agreement. AMEG did just that, working with coordinating partners Business Initiative Leading Development in Bangladesh and the Confederation of Indian Industry.

- *Overly ambitious scopes of work.* Frequently groups of barriers (e.g., the plethora of standards needing harmonization) are too large to tackle in a timely fashion.
  - *Proposed solution.* Take a more granular, action-oriented approach in defining the scope of each action in the action plan. For example, instead of awaiting the full implementation of nationwide agricultural reforms, define the required changes in customs and other operations at a specific border crossing, or with respect to a specific product or limited set of products affected by an NTB (e.g., Bangladesh tomato exports to the Indian state of Tripura).
- *Excessive focus on creating permanent institutional bodies.* Historically, the focus has been on the creation of overly bureaucratic bodies that take on a life of their own, bent more on protocol and perpetuating themselves than on accomplishing tasks in reasonable periods of time.
  - *Proposed solution.* Use private-sector led, time-limited, objective-specific task forces as the implementing mechanism for eliminating NTBs on a case-by-case basis.

- *Lack of strategy and concrete action plans for NTB elimination.* NTBs have been targeted on an ad hoc basis. That is, donors, NGOs, or others have identified the NTBs to target, not necessarily reflecting the issues that have the highest economic priority for the country or the reforms that have the highest probability of being fully implemented.
  - *Proposed solution.* Develop multi-year strategies in one or more participating nations and then develop concrete time-bound annual action plans for strategy implementation. Thereafter, refine strategies annually based on experience.
- *Suboptimal coordination in implementation.* Because of the unintegrated, ad hoc approach to identification of NTBs to target, implementation is also fragmented.
  - *Proposed solution.* Provide a world-class coordinating function for action plan implementation, including wide dissemination of success stories.
- *Getting the right people into the room.* While gaining attendance at the above-mentioned AMEG-sponsored events was generally not a problem, getting the right decision-influencers and decision-makers into at the room was often a challenge.
  - *Proposed solution.* Focus on identifying private sector-driven initiatives with high prospects of public sector collaboration at senior levels, and inspire these leaders to follow through.

Not mentioned by those attending the above-mentioned events, but relevant nonetheless to continuing work on compliance with regional NTMs and the elimination of NTBs, are the following factors:

- *Limited opportunity for sustained funding of bilateral initiatives targeting NTB elimination.* Few bilateral USAID missions in South Asia have trade-related activities. Those that missions that do, Bangladesh and Pakistan<sup>2</sup>, have limited ability to fund the participation of other SAARC trading partners in bilateral discussions.
  - *Proposed solution.* Creation of the South Asia Borderless Alliance (SABA), a regional coordination and funding mechanism could work with bilateral coordinating partners to overcome each of the above-mentioned challenges.

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<sup>2</sup> Pakistan and Afghanistan fall under USAID's Office of Afghanistan and Pakistan Affairs. India, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka are under the purview of USAID's Bureau for Asia.

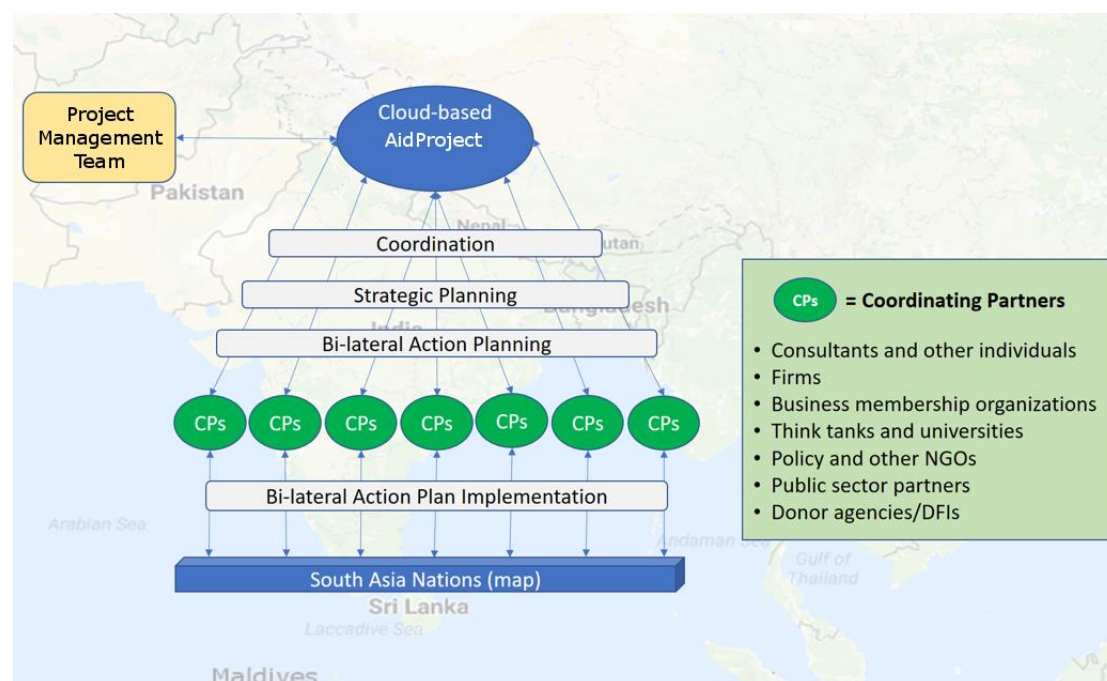
## SECTION 2

# SOUTH ASIA BORDERLESS ALLIANCE DESIGN

## A. PURPOSE, COLLABORATION COMPONENTS, AND MANAGERIAL APPROACH

**Purpose.** As described in the previous section, efforts have been underway for years to slash trade barriers, but South Asia remains one of the world's least integrated regions on the trade front. Much has been said in many meetings about these barriers, but there has been little progress in eliminating them, despite the well-documented economic gains that elimination would bring. SABA would move beyond past approaches, which have consisted largely of public-private discussion groups that air grievances and responses to them, and begin and end with little collective political will for change. The purpose of SABA is to provide a new, more disciplined, standardized, efficient, and targeted approach to tackling and eliminating barriers to trade in the region.

**Exhibit 2. The SABA Structure**



SABA's key collaboration components (see Exhibit 2) are the following:

- **Project management team.** To launch SABA, a USAID implementer will mobilize a lean project management team based in the United States and South Asia to manage implementation of SABA activities in collaboration with coordinating partners. Note that IPEC events provided good information on the nature of the challenges facing governments and private sector counterparts in the region. Many of those challenges are not chiefly of a technical nature, but instead stem from cultural norms and lack of understanding of many processes underpinning change. A particular challenge of note is the rapid changes needed to liberalize

trade in a reasonable timeframe. To forge closer relationships and better understand the realities on the ground in South Asia, SABA will have long-term representation in the region — preferably in New Delhi or Dhaka. It will develop, train, and retain a limited number of resident representatives in USAID well versed in regulations, the task force mechanism, and the cloud-based portal, including its action plan implementation mechanism.

- *Coordinating partners.* Initially, the SABA project management team will work through one or more coordinating partners at each end of a bilateral trade relationship. Coordinating partners may vary from country to country and from trade barrier to trade barrier. Coordinating partners will include private sector firms, business membership organizations, other NGOs, public sector entities, or donor projects in South Asia. Coordinating partners might also be found outside of South Asia. For example, considering export opportunities for U.S. companies, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce (USCC), the National Association of Manufacturers, and other business member organizations might be partners. Initial discussions with USCC indicated preliminary interest.
- *AidProject.* A cloud-based action plan of the implementation system will facilitate real-time coordination in carrying out mutually agreed actions across multiple bilateral relationships, coordinating partners, and trade barriers. This system will also streamline communications and project management across the various countries in which SABA implementers are based.
- *Standardized approach to implementation management.* SABA will use a disciplined, standardized approach to action plan development and implementation. The approach is adaptable to any bilateral relationship, coordinating partners, and specific trade barrier. Broadly speaking, the work of SABA will be governed by three standard and fundamental features:
  - *Memorandum of understanding (MOU)* between the SABA project management team and each coordinating partner, in which the parties agree to the terms by which SABA resources will be directed to assist the coordinating partner in eliminating specific trade barriers
  - *An agreed time-bound action plan*, which begins with the establishment of clear political will for change by agreement between the governments and private sectors on each end of the bilateral relationship.
  - *Use of small, focused, and time-bound task forces* agreeing to the specifics of change and to actually implementing the change.

Implementation of each of these three features will be coordinated between the SABA management team and private and public coordinating partners using AidProject. Day-to-day management of compliance with these fundamental implementation features will be carried out by the SABA PMT, in coordination with participating coordinating partners.

## B. KEY DESIGN ELEMENTS OF THE BORDERLESS ALLIANCE

### B1. DESIGN ELEMENT 1: REGIONAL YET PRIMARILY BILATERAL

SABA is designed as a regional initiative capable of working with any bilateral combination of South Asian nation, subject to the availability of funding. However, based on experiences gleaned through AMEG, the recommendation is that it focus first on the most promising unilateral relationships. In this way, SABA would generate early successes and momentum for further change. In this regard, the following regional circumstances should be noted:

*Periphery country focus.* India is the center of the region and the only one in the region that shares borders with every other South Asian nation. Its population, gross domestic product, international trade, and trade surplus dwarf those of every other country in the region as does the significant trade surplus it enjoys with each of them (see Exhibit 3). For these reasons, SABA-supported action plans will be developed first with coordinating partners in the countries on India's periphery and then with coordinating partners in India.

*Special issues.* Of note, the security challenges in Afghanistan and Pakistan, as well as historically intractable Pakistan-India relations, suggest that most of the early opportunities for SABA success lie in the bilateral relationships between India and its SAARC trading partners to the north, south, and east. In addition, certain trading partners have significant and unique trade strategies. For example, a strategic focus of Sri Lanka is on its advantageous location in the center of the Indian Ocean, along the main shipping routes between East Asia and Europe/Middle East and its proximity to south Indian ports. Such opportunities should be supported even though it could involve bilateral relationships between Sri Lanka and partners in Southeast Asia.

**Exhibit 3. India's Central Role in Regional Trade**

India-Other SAARC Trade in Goods 12 Months from 6/16 to 5/17 US \$ 000s	
Total SAARC Trade	20,242,741
India Imp fr SAARC	2,636,013
India Exp to SAARC	17,606,728
Bangladesh Imp fr India	6,214,065
Nepal Imp fr India	4,808,568
Sri Lanka Imp fr India	3,823,021
Pakistan Imp fr India	1,641,052
Afghanistan Imp fr India	538,753
Bhutan Imp fr India	383,962
Maldives Imp fr India	197,307

*Source: International Trade Center*

### B2. DESIGN ELEMENT 2: IMPLEMENTING CRITERIA

Many of the reasons for slow progress in realizing regional connectivity, eliminating NTBs, and greater trade integration stem from the continued use of ineffective approaches. They include lack of practical, realistic strategy; limited action planning; events attended by participants with limited knowledge and little decision-making power; poorly focused discussions; and few performance indicators. In addition, these efforts are often led ad hoc by isolated participant interests, donor interests, or other special interests. To avoid these pitfalls, SABA will adhere to the following implementing criteria in allocating its resources:

- Support will be consistent with and flow from the following foundational SABA documents:

- An MOU between the project management team and each participating coordinating partner outlining SABA's approach to implementation and requiring coordinating partner agreement with this approach
- An annual action plan, updated quarterly, identifying NTB elimination opportunities in existing national trade strategies, and developing step-by-step change implementation roadmaps resulting in NTB elimination
- Activities will be designed and implemented under the guidance of time-bound task forces, using clearly articulated objectives, goals, and key performance indicators
- SABA support will be allocated on a first-come, first-served basis to reward serious, early adopters and proactive performance. The aim is to generate early successes upon which to build, inspire further action, and maximize impact.

### **B3. DESIGN ELEMENT 3: ANNUAL ACTION PLANNING**

Coordinating partners will be chosen for their knowledge of the economic strategies of governments and private business communities in the region. Following the startup phase and the execution of an MOU with two or more coordinating partners in any target country, SABA would field consultant(s) to conduct a trade strategy assessment for that country in collaboration with coordinating partners, the private sector, and the government.

The broad focus of these assessments would be on redressing the hefty trade imbalances with India, increasing trade with neighboring regions (e.g., Southeast Asia) and the rest of the world, national competitive advantage, and economic impact. Specifically, each assessment would identify a reasonable number of barriers that are inconsistent with current strategies for increasing trade. Typically, these would include non-compliance with legitimate NTMs and outright NTBs, but could also include other trade-related issues.

Each assessment would:

- Describe each barrier in terms of the objectives and goals that if achieved will signal elimination of the barrier
- Convert each identified barrier into the step-by-step hierarchy of activities, subactivities, and specific actions necessary to eliminate the barrier
- Organize those activities, subactivities, and specific actions into a logical, priority order and critical path
- Assign measurable key milestones and/or performance indicators to each action for objectively determining its accomplishment
- Describe the resource allocations necessary to accomplish each action, including effective implementation management
- Assign a realistic timeframe by which to bind achievement of each action, and to coordinate adherence to that timeframe

- Specify the critical elements of a robust monitoring and evaluation plan to ensure learning for possible action plan modification, improve performance, and generate and disseminate knowledge

Assessments would culminate in a two day workshop with coordinating partner organizations and, depending on available budget, one or more priority strategic initiatives would be converted into the initial annual action plan. Subsequent annual plans would follow a similar process.

Following agreement on the annual action plan, the agreed step-by-step hierarchy of activities, subactivities, and specific actions necessary to eliminate the barrier would be entered into SABA's cloud-based AidProject system.

- Each planning element and its constituent actions would be electronically embedded into AidProject so that all those participating in the plan's implementation can visualize the entire plan and the specific aspects with which they are associated. "All participating" would include, but not be limited to, funding agencies such as the State Department or USAID, the SABA implementing contractor, coordinating partners in South Asia, and supporting consultants.
- The attributes of each element and their implementing actions: name and descriptive content, timing, and non-financial resources allocated to each action.
- All deliverables specified for each action would be linked to the action for efficient reporting, archiving, retrieval, and auditing.
- Gantt charts reflecting the entire work plan or any element of the plan could be generated as could email and SMS messaging related to elements and actions.

An initial version of AidProject would be mobilized within a month of launching SABA<sup>3</sup> to support rollout, initial strategy development, and action planning training. It would also provide SABA global coordinating capability and real-time interaction on implementation with all parties participating in implementation, regardless of their location and time zone. In the course of Year 1, the system would be upgraded to fit the specifics of South Asia. This system would be initially owned by the SABA project management team and then eventually handed over to local organizations as they take an increasing leadership role in implementation of the alliance.

#### **B4. DESIGN ELEMENT 4: TASK FORCE IMPLEMENTATION MECHANISM**

##### **Task force methodology**

To avoid the loss of time and momentum involved with creating new institutional bodies, SABA will work with existing institutions using a task force mechanism that utilizes small groups with a specific set of skills to accomplish a specific, time-limited objective. Task force success or failure usually boils down to three things:

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<sup>3</sup> AidProject is a system that has been used on several USAID programs around the world and would require minimal modifications to meet the needs of SABA. The creation of a new cloud-based platform would require more than a month to meet the needs of SABA.

- *How well the team's objective and goals are defined.* An overarching objective is critical to task force success, as are inevitable subsidiary objectives that will serve as milestones on the path to success. Both the overarching objective and its subsidiary objectives should be as specific, or granular, as possible. They should be written as a task force charter from the outset (see more below).
- *Task force composition.* The task force will require:
  - Relevant technical and leadership skills
  - Organizational and advocacy clout
  - Team potential to foresee roadblocks, bottlenecks, and other challenges
  - Capacity to forge implementable solutions
  - A versatile mix of technical expertise, leadership, foresight, and solution-oriented thinking from both the public and private sectors. This will bring multiple perspectives to the task, democratize buy-in, enhance communication, and ease the inevitable challenges of implementation.
- *How well task force members collaborate.* Collaboration is vastly improved by clear delineation in the task force charter of roles and responsibilities of the task force, as well as of others who may be essential in success (e.g., senior management and line managers).

#### **Task force charter**

As mentioned above, a written charter is essential to define roles and responsibilities among the various participants in specific NTB reform efforts. Preferably, it should be no more than one page, specifying the following:

- Objective of the project that the task force is set up to achieve and the subsidiary objectives designed to achieve success
- Task force member roles and responsibilities
- Overall project timeline
- A list of specific subtasks, associated expected work products, and work product delivery dates
- Resources that will be made available by participating organizations, including task force members themselves and their availability to do the work

#### **Stages of team development**

The SABA project management team and its South Asian private-sector CPs will assemble and develop task forces through the following five stages<sup>4</sup>:

- *Forming.* Identify the smallest, manageable set of public and private sector governance institutions relevant to achieving the objective. Task force size is usually four to 12 people, but the smaller the better. The optimal size is five to seven. During the initial meeting, team members identify their similarities, expectations, resources, and skills. They agree to the task force objective and goals, which usually occurs early in the process.

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<sup>4</sup> Tuckman, Bruce W (1965). "Developmental sequence in small groups". *Psychological Bulletin*. 63 (6): 384–399.

- *Storming.* Members identify the processes, roles, and resource needed. They deal with their differences and communication issues. Fundamental questions about the task force objective and goals may surface and be resolved.
- *Norming.* Members collaborate in decision-making, give and receive feedback effectively, agree on direction and desired outcomes, timeframes, and roles and responsibilities. At the end of this stage, members have agreed on their respective roles and responsibilities.
- *Performing.* Members utilize effective methods to attain the task force goals, respond quickly to change during the process, and achieve the desired results.
- *Adjourning.* Having completed its tasks and attained its objective, the team dissolves. However, successful teams often re-team in a new task force to solve related problems.

### **Accelerating progress**

The following eight items accelerate task force progress during the forming and storming stages if the group addresses them during the first meeting or two:

- *Procedures.* Ask “What meeting agreements will we follow? What tools will we use to stay on track and move quickly? How will decisions be negotiated and finalized?”
- *Logistics.* Define a process for distributing information and resources to members.
- *Expectations.* Make agreements about members’ attendance, and completing assignments.
- *Skills and resources.* Identify and mobilize the resources within the task force and those available from the outside.
- *Teamwork building.* Use one of many exercises to enhance teamwork (e.g., team members identify their respective strengths and how they will support each other to fill the gaps).
- *Communication.* Identify members’ styles (e.g., by using a communication style assessment), then discuss the best ways to get information across to each other, brainstorm creatively, and manage conflict.
- *Leadership.* Fill roles such as group convener/leader, facilitator, recorder, and research coordinator.
- *Action plan.* Identify specific tasks, who will be responsible for them, target dates for completion and, if necessary, a budget.

Task forces that address these eight items early achieve better results, show success more quickly, report a greater sense of accomplishment, and are more likely to volunteer for subsequent projects. At the early stages of the relationships with coordinating partners, the lead implementers of SABA will provide training in the use of the task force so that the project management team and its private-sector CPs have a shared understanding of the methodology and can promote these principles in unison.

### **Continuous improvement cycle**

To focus the scope of task force work from the outset, each task force will follow the continuous improvement cycle:

- *Step 1.* Identify international best practice related to achieving the objective or its parent topic.
- *Step 2.* Identify policy, legal, regulatory, and procedural gaps relevant to achieving identified international best practice. Where necessary to support any step herein, identify and conduct practical, results-oriented research in collaboration with local institutions.
- *Step 3.* Where necessary for successful implementation, design and deliver public-private dialogue sessions to gain buy-in and agreement among participating institutions.
- *Step 4.* Identify opportunities to streamline (i.e., process reengineering) regulations and procedures to effect changes necessary to achieve international best practice, including opportunities to automate procedures with state-of-the-art information and communication technology. Focus wherever possible on changes that can be implemented with minimal legal and regulatory reform.
- *Step 5.* Identify structural and human capacity gaps within participating public and private institutions that inhibit successful implementation of the change envisioned in Step 4, and design and deliver a program of practical technical assistance and training to close these gaps.
- *Step 6.* Identify key performance indicators that when achieved signal success, and design and use monitoring and evaluation feedback loops to measure and report on progress toward achievement of these indicators.

#### **B4. DESIGN ELEMENT 5: SABA SUSTAINABILITY**

During the first five years of SABA, the implementing contractor will develop relationships with coordinating partners whose primary role is the provision of financial and non-financial to support SABA's work. For example, companies, business member associations, and other organizations might provide meeting venues, guest speakers, or other resources. Corporate social responsibility programs might contribute to successful implementation of specific action plan elements. Other ongoing donor projects with parallel interests might partner with SABA through complementary in-kind resources, such as contributing staff time like the USAID-funded Bangladesh Trade Facilitation Activity did when partnering with AMEG. Small infrastructure investments could be crowd-funded through the cloud-based portal. Efforts will also be made to attract regional firms to fund SABA on a membership basis.

The ultimate goal is to turn SABA over to a governing board of seven, on which sit representatives of the most successful coordinating partners. That is, those coordinating partners that fully adopt the SABA operating model and have the best track record using it will assume leadership of SABA implementation.

### C. GUIDANCE ON SCOPE OF WORK FLEXIBILITY

The size and complexity of South Asia suggests the need for flexibility in the scope of work of the borderless alliance. The complexity of trade itself suggests the need for flexibility as well. Projects with narrow scopes of work suffer the risk on non-performance along several lines. Key elements to avoid are enumerated below.

*Do not limit SABA to focusing on a specific technical category or subcategory.* SABA should not be limited to a specific area of technical support. Furthermore, it is recommended that SABA have access to a grants pool to incentivize other investment, perhaps through mechanisms such as public-private partnerships.

*Do not limit SABA to focusing on a specific set of coordinating partners, particularly specific government counterparts, within a country.* Getting the right people into the room is key to getting the right outcomes and defining next steps. This would limit SABA's ability to identify the greatest opportunity for early and ongoing implementation success. Early successes are critical to inspiring and attracting success-oriented partners, and are therefore essential to achieving overall project objectives.

*Do not limit SABA to a single source of technical assistance.* In short, while the United States is often a source of strong technical advisors, other countries are as well. Furthermore, the availability of the best advisors from the United States is often constrained by demand or other factors.

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